



Meeting Summary February 22, 2017

Attendance

Panel Members: Hank Alinger, Chair
Don Taylor, Vice Chair (excused)
Bob Gorman
Weiwei Jia
Fred Marino (excused)
Sujit Mishra
Julie Wilson (excused)

DPZ Staff: Valdis Lazdins, Randy Clay, George Saliba, Yvette Zhou

Plan #17-04: New Cultural Center

Owner/Developer: Toby's General Partnership, Orchard Development Corporation

Architect: Design Collective, Inc.

1. Call to Order – DAP Chair Hank Alinger opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Alinger asked the DAP, staff, and project team to introduce themselves.

2. Review of New Cultural Center

Background

The New Cultural Center (NCC) site is located in Downtown Columbia, just west of Route 29. It is bounded by South Entrance Road on the east and Symphony Woods Road to the west and north. A new road, the North–South Connector, will be constructed along the western edge of the site. The triangularly shaped parcel is 2.6 acres, zoned New Town (NT), and located in Crescent Neighborhood - Area 7. Toby's Dinner Theatre currently operates there and will be incorporated into the new development. This Site Development Plan (SDP) requires review by the DAP.

Applicant Presentation

The applicant provided an overview of the Cultural Center. The project is designed as a mixed-use, signature building, with residential, arts, and retail. Toby's Dinner Theatre will remain in operation during construction and move into Phase One once it is completed. Toby's Dinner Theater will then be demolished and the site incorporated into the rest of the development.

The entry plaza to the proposed performing arts building, as well as the primary entrance to the residential building, are located on the west side of the site, adjacent to the future North South Connector. Access to the arts and cultural space is gained either from the interior of the parking garage or the drop off at the entry plaza. Access to the residential space is either from the parking garage, or from the residential lobby at the southwest corner of the site. The service and loading area is being further studied to keep turning maneuvers out of the public right-of-way.

Performing arts functions will be on the northern half of the site. The shared arts lobby and the residential entry will be at the southwest corner. The first two floors provide educational and performing arts space, while residential occupies floors three to seven. Common amenity spaces for residents will be on the third floor. The two story entry is intended to tie the performing and visual arts center together. The intent is for the housing and the arts components to be integrated as one project. The garage is located on the south side of the site and is wrapped by the building on three sides.

The plaza has an area carved out that serves as a drop off for buses and vehicles. The vehicular area of the plaza is demarcated from pedestrian areas by a line of bollards. A ten foot wide multi-use path goes through the plaza and around three sides of the site. The plaza is paved with decorative porcelain pavers and has an integrated seat wall that accommodates grading and allows plantings against the building.

The north end of the building sits on axis with downtown Columbia. Two vertical architectural elements will sit on a podium and be linked by a glass bridge; bringing together the two sides of the residential building. A public rooftop terrace sits on the third floor at its northern tip and will be accessible by stairs and elevators from the lobby. This space will be used for events and social gatherings. Landscaping has been added where the terrace abuts the residential building to soften and screen it. Public art will be incorporated into the design of the terrace. A private residential courtyard sits farther within the interior of this floor and a second residential courtyard sits above the entrance plaza, overlooking Symphony Woods.

Micro bioretention will be used treat stormwater and trees will be planted along the edges of the site using Black Gums, evergreens, understory, canopy, and flowering trees.

Staff Presentation

This project is subject to the Crescent Neighborhood Design Guidelines (CNDG). Written comments from the public were provided to the DAP in advance of this meeting. DAP recommendations on downtown Columbia plans are forwarded to the Planning Board. DPZ briefly described the project and recommended the DAP evaluate architecture, site design, service and loading areas, the parking garage, amenity spaces, landscaping, and site furnishings.

DAP Questions and Comments

Service and Loading

The DAP asked about the service and loading area off South Entrance Road and ways to improve turning movements and keep truck maneuvers internal to the site. The applicant responded that a traffic study is in progress and plans are being revised to reduce the loading area down to one dock. This will allow all service vehicle turning movements to be accommodated within the building.

Parking Garage

The DAP noted that landscaping and the design of the garage façade along the southern edge of the site are important considerations, since this elevation is visible from the property to the south,

the South Entrance Road, and possibly the Route 29 ramp. The applicant discussed plans to include perforated metal screening on the garage façade, as well as a green screen-wall.

Shared Access Drive

The DAP asked if a shared access easement had been considered for a single drive that would be shared between this site and the one to the south. The applicant responded that a shared two way access drive had been examined, but did not appear to be feasible based on discussions with State Highway Administration (SHA) and Howard County traffic engineers. The applicant noted that access to the drive from the parking garage will be controlled and only used during shows and events. Buses will queue along the drive while waiting to pick-up patrons attending shows and events. The applicant is willing to grant a common access easement to allow a future shared access drive, if and when the site to the south redevelops.

Public Terrace

The DAP discussed the third floor public terrace and recommended adding a vertical structure, such as a trellis planted with vines, to shade and reduce the scale of the space.

Site Design

The DAP discussed the importance of pedestrian connections to and from the site and noted a focal point at its northern tip, which is a large and highly visible, ground level green space. The DAP recommended adding more pedestrian amenities, benches, and public art.

Architecture

The DAP discussed the architecture and different design strategies to make the residential and arts/cultural buildings cohesive, while still differentiating between them. They acknowledged this was challenge. The DAP discussed whether the residential towers overwhelmed the cultural center and how the cultural center could be more prominent. Suggestions included using different materials or colors to strengthen the base and further differentiate it from the housing. The applicant stated that it was a conscious decision to ensure the housing portion and cultural portion were well integrated. Materials and colors for each segment of the project were selected accordingly.

DAP Motions for Recommendations

DAP member Bob Gorman made the following motion:

1. The applicant continue to refine the design of the third floor public terrace and consider additional landscaping, as well as a trellis to better define and add scale. Seconded by DAP member Sujit Mishra.

Vote: 4-0 to approve

DAP Chair Hank Alinger made the following motion:

2. The applicant study the north end of the site and create more of a park like setting, with seating and artwork to add interest and to take better advantage of the greenspace. Seconded by DAP member Sujit Mishra.

Vote: 4-0 to approve

DAP Chair Hank Alinger made the following motion:

3. The applicant pay particular attention to the design of the parking garage façade along the southern portion of the site. Seconded by DAP member Sujit Mishra.

Vote: 4-0 to approve

DAP member Sujit Mishra made the following motion:

4. The applicant rethink the design of the cultural arts center to differentiate it from the residential portion of the building. Seconded by DAP Chair Hank Alinger

Vote: 2-1 to disapprove (one member abstained)

3. Other Business:

The election of DAP officers was postponed until next meeting.

4. Call to Adjourn

Mr. Alinger adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.